

South Africa

Active Learning About Climate Change



Scientific evidence suggests that the global warming caused by greenhouse gases is changing world weather patterns and may result in floods, droughts, and other natural disasters. Although the long-term effects of climate change remain to be seen, the immediate human costs, in terms of pollution and poor air quality, are serious enough to warrant action.

In 2002, South Africa was the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Africa and the 18th largest emitter in the world. USAID/South Africa asked GreenCOM to develop education activities to help the South African government address climate change. The main objectives of GreenCOM's work were to raise public awareness of the impact of global climate change, encourage behaviors that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and introduce climate change curricular materials in the formal education system.



Focus Groups Pinpoint Key Concerns

GreenCOM's strategic approach began with a series of ten focus groups conducted in three provinces. The focus groups enabled the project to collect information on people's knowledge of climate change and to identify actions people were willing to take to address it. The focus group findings indicated that most people had a moderate understanding of the causes of climate change.

Most respondents also expressed some anxiety about the effects of climate change on daily life and the country's natural resources. Several specific concerns included:

- The impact of climate change on rainfall patterns and food production.

- An increase in crime related to reduced food production.
- More health problems because of unusual weather patterns caused by global climate change.
- Decreased plant and animal biodiversity and general degradation of South Africa's natural beauty.

Focus group participants said they would be willing to take several actions to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions, including carpooling to reduce auto emissions and cutting back on the use of electric lights in the home.

It became clear from the focus groups that effective education and communication interventions would need to focus on the relationship between reduced greenhouse gases and improved health, financial savings from lower energy costs, and greater overall quality of life.

Awareness and Change Through Education

One component of GreenCOM's strategy was to develop curricular materials on climate change for South Africa's schools. A working group of stakeholders was formed to oversee the development of materials. Members included the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), the National Environmental Education Program, the Department of Education, provincial government representatives, environmental educators, weather service organizations, and NGOs involved in environmental education. This working group also helped to design an incentive program to encourage schools throughout the country to adopt the climate change curriculum.

The group recommended that GreenCOM's education component focus on sixth grade students because the South African schools were restructuring the curriculum for that grade and teachers would welcome new resources.

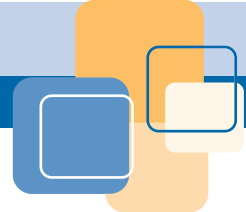


Through a collaborative, participatory process, GreenCOM produced a curriculum guide for sixth grade students. (Available online, <http://www.greencom.org>)

Participatory Program Development

The members of GreenCOM's working group agreed to focus on several program components that were to be developed in a collaborative, participatory process:

- A teacher's resource guide on global climate change
- Teacher training workshops on using the guide
- A national climate change competition for sixth graders
- A media campaign to publicize the competition and boost public interest in climate change issues.



1. Teacher's Resource Guide

South African environmental education experts were brought together to plan the teacher's guide. They agreed that it should provide general information on climate change as well as information on connections between climate change and human activities, ecosystems, agriculture, health, coastal systems, and indigenous cultures. It would be oriented toward action, with student projects and suggestions for new behaviors teachers could introduce to students, who would then share the behaviors with their families. Two educators took the lead in writing the guide. The final product was a colorful illustrated book called *Learning about Climate Change*. Nearly 200,000 copies of the book were distributed in less than a year to schools, youth, and educational organizations across the country.

2. Teacher Training Workshops

After the guide was printed, GreenCOM and partners organized workshops throughout the country to introduce the new resource to sixth grade teachers. Three pilot training sessions helped project staff to refine the workshops, which consisted of short presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and small group work. By the end of the project, GreenCOM had conducted 56 workshops with a total of 2,028 teachers trained.

3. National Climate Change Competition

The competition was designed to encourage sixth grade classes throughout the country to initiate projects on climate change-related issues. Ideal projects involved not just students but also their families and surrounding communities.

GreenCOM worked with provincial coordinators from the National Environmental Education

Program to develop a competition rulebook and entry form, publicize the contest, and select judges and criteria for the awards. Two judges were selected for each province. These individuals were required to have a background in environmental education and could not have connections with any of the schools involved in the competition.

More than 300 schools from all but one of South Africa's nine provinces applied to participate in the competition, which was held first at the provincial level in September 2002. In addition to receiving cash prizes, two winners from each of the provincial competitions went on to a national competition in Durban the following month.

4. Media Campaign

To generate public interest in the climate change schools competition, GreenCOM worked with a public relations firm on a variety of marketing activities. Press releases were distributed to newspapers in the provinces to announce the campaign, and GreenCOM also held a press conference to launch the teacher's guide. Several prominent media outlets covered the competition including the e.tv network, which featured an interview with participants on prime time news. The winners of the national competition were also featured on *Blue Couch*, a children's environmental program aired on national channel SABC3. Finally, as a capacity building effort, GreenCOM also arranged a media training workshop for technical staff from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. This workshop gave them skills for interacting with the mass media for effective outreach and public relations.

Corporate Partnerships

Another component of GreenCOM's strategy in South Africa was to target the country's top companies with a marketing campaign to make them more aware of climate change and engage them in the implementation of possible solutions. As a result, the Web-based campaign called Green Thread was developed.

Green Thread focused on relatively simple changes in corporate behavior that businesses could implement internally through employee outreach and participation. The suggested changes were targeted at three areas: electricity, waste management, and pollution. Three companies signed on as Green Thread partners and 13 other companies agreed to participate in the program.

Results and Lessons Learned

GreenCOM's year-long program in South Africa promoted awareness of global climate change and actions to address it through education, media coverage, and private sector engagement. Project staff ensured the sustainability of several activities by including training and capacity building components whenever possible. For example, the production and distribution of the climate change teacher's guide was accompanied by a comprehensive program of teacher training workshops to ensure its proper use in schools for years to come.

Likewise, GreenCOM involved a variety of stakeholders in implementing the national schools

competition to help ensure sustainability of the program. The project also secured funding for the following year's competition from a corporate sponsor, Telkom Payphone Unit.

Finally, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism benefited not only from the curriculum materials and schools competition, but also from the training on media relations that GreenCOM sponsored. This training will serve department staff in the coming years as they seek to enhance environmental education in the country and publicize government efforts to improve environmental management.

Selected Publications and Products

Allen, Irma, and Doc Shongwe. *Learning about Climate Change: An Environmental Education Learning Resource for Educators*. Pretoria, South Africa: Academy for Educational Development (AED), 2002.

Community Agency for Social Inquiry. *Report on Knowledge of Climate Change*. Braamfontein, South Africa: Author, 2002.

Romano, Rose Mary. *GreenCOM/South Africa: Final Report*. Washington, DC: AED, 2003.



GreenCOM

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